Some Say 'Heat Now'; I Say 'Heat, but Heat With Honor'

By Art Buchwald

Capitol Punishment

It is wrong to think that President Nixon's political future rests on what evidence is produced by the Watergate hearings or whether the Supreme Court decides he has to give up the White House tapes.

The President's rise or fall in the next six months will depend on whether the United States has a cold winter. With predictions for a heating oil shortage, the biggest political issue will be the weather.

Let us suppose that for some reason the elements have been unkind to us and the United States has a very cold winter. The Antrobus family is huddled in the living room, freezing to death. Mr. Antrobus has thrown all the furniture into the fireplace and is about to dump the television set in the flames when President Nixon, speaking from the Winter White House in Key Biscayne, comes on the air.

"My fellow Americans, I wish to speak tonight on a subject that is close to many of your hearts. I am sure you are asking why is the United States, the greatest power in the world, without heat? Why are the American people, who have the highest standard of living in the history of mankind, cold?

"If you recall, in my *second* State of the Union message, I asked Congress for a mild winter.

"I asked them to pass legislation that would make it unlawful for the temperature to go below 40 degrees. I demanded that they give me the authority to move in on any cold front that could cause chaos in this country.

"It is typical of Congress that they ignored my request. Instead of passing a law to guarantee a mild winter, they passed a bill that would have cost the American taxpayer $1 billion in fuel costs. When I vetoed this bill in October, I told you that I would never sign anything that would add to the inflationary spiral in this country. At that time I said, and I still believe the vast majority of Americans feel as I do, that it's better to shiver than pay higher taxes. Your response was overwhelmingly in my favor.

"Now I know you're asking, 'Why are we having a cold winter?' The responsibility lies not only with Congress, but with a press and TV media that for the past four months have been devoting endless space and time to weather reports that show the United States is a cold nation. Well, I can tell you tonight, my fellow Americans, you have been given a distorted picture of this country. There are great parts of the United States that aren't cold. Florida isn't cold; Texas isn't cold; Southern California isn't cold. But does the press write about these places? Do the network news programs show the sun shining over Arizona and New Mexico? All we ever see or read about is New England and Minnesota.

"The truth is since I took office in 1968, more people have been warm than at any time in our history. But at the same time I am aware that there are some people in this country who are cold. A few of them through no fault of their own.

"We are going to help these people if they need help. But we're not going to give a blank check to those able-bodied people who are capable of finding ways of keeping warm without government assistance.

"My fellow Americans, I'd like to end on a personal note. I received a letter the other day from a 7-year-old girl and she wrote, 'Mr. President, every night when I say my prayers, I ask God to bless you for bringing us a generation of heat.'"

Mr. Antrobus threw the television set into the fireplace.

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